

“What’s Shame got to do with it?”

The Concept of Shame in Restorative Practice

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Much anguish is caused by misunderstanding the concept of shame within a Restorative Practices framework. “Naming and shaming”, “shameful behaviour” “You ought to be ashamed of yourself” are phrases that appear to contradict the spirit of restoration and that appear to be imply a punitive rather than restorative mindset. And so they do since the concept of Shame within Restorative Practice is entirely unrelated to Shame in its traditional, punitive meaning.

In the following I will look at three aspects of Shame and its understanding and application in Restorative Practice (particularly in a school context). I will start with the concept of Shame as developed in Silvan Tomkin’s Affect Theory and applied in Don Nathanson’s Compass of Shame. I will look at John Braithwaite’s concept of Reintegrative Shaming, and I will briefly discuss the Real Justice script.¹

So what **has** Shame got to do with it?

Restorative Practice finds its sociological underpinning in Silvan Tomkin’s Affect Theory and John Braithwaite’s anthropological research on dealing with wrongdoing in indigenous communities.

Tomkin identified nine different affects that govern human behaviour and that describe the continuum of human emotions. He identifies as positive affects (or emotions) the continuums of enjoyment-joy and interest-excitement. Shame is a negative affect (or emotion). Indeed, it is the disruption of any positive affect.

Within a classroom there are many instances that illustrate Shame as an affect governing behaviour:

- a child does not understand the task set
- a teacher has problems settling a class
- a student does not like the subject
- a student is asked to stop chatting
- a teacher is asked to stop mid-flow of an explanation or activity
- a teacher watches students throw paper aeroplanes across a room

¹ I will not consider mediation where you may find several aggrieved parties.

Whilst none of these instances are “shameful” in the traditional sense, they all are disruption of positive affects, hence instances of Shame as understood in a Restorative Practices framework.

Don Nathanson applied Tomkin’s affect theory to his study of Shame. In his *Compass of Shame* he subsequently identified four different ways on how individuals deal with Shame:

- Withdrawal
- Avoidance
- Attack Self
- Attack Other

Looking at the above-mentioned examples we can see clearly how Shame may lead to behavioural challenges in our classes.

- A student who does not understand a task may start doodling and chatting to their neighbour (withdrawal), start disrupting the class (attack other), call himself stupid (attack self), start truanting (avoidance)....
- A student is asked to stop chatting. They may start arguing back (attack other)...
- A teacher is asked to stop mid-flow of an explanation or activity. They may make a sarcastic comment to punish the students for disrupting their plan (attack other), they may start doubting the quality of their instruction (attack self)...
- A teacher watches students throw paper aeroplanes across a room (they may start shouting and questioning students’ intelligence or upbringing (attack other). They may call for help (leading to attack self: I need help, I am useless....)
- In my own practice, when faced with a seriously dysfunctional class last year I experienced all four points of the *Compass of Shame*: I believed I was useless (attack self), I blamed the school for not “sorting” it (attack other), I started feeling ill and could not sleep at night (withdrawal), I tried to find ways of not having to face the class (avoidance)...

There are many more instances and examples that could be named. Suffice it to say that in none of them Shame is a punitive concept. It is a negative affect that occurs when enjoyment-joy and interest-excitement are being interrupted. The Concept of

Shame helps us understand behaviours – both behaviours that cause harm and behaviours that occur when harm has been caused.

Ted Wachtel and Bob Costello of the iirp (International Institute of Restorative Practices) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania believe that the reason for the increase in youth crime and the increase and severity of behavioural challenges in schools is due to the fact that young people's predominant reaction to the experience of Shame has become Attack Other. This means that where in the past a student who experienced Shame (by being reprimanded, not understanding a task, not enjoying a lesson) may have expressed this Shame through the poles of Withdrawal and Attack Self, we now see a pre-dominance of Attack Other.

It is essential that restorative practitioners recognise these "Attacks" as expressions of Shame. Hence, giggling during a conference or reparation meeting, trying to widen the argument by finding something to "throw back" at the victim – none are disrespectful, all may be expressions of shame. It is essential here to remind oneself of the basic postulate of a restorative intervention: RJ only takes place if a wrongdoer has admitted their wrong doing. However, it may not be enough for the facilitator to recognise Shame in a wrongdoer when the victim feels laughed at or belittled. Two ways may be chosen to deal with such Attack Other manifestations of Shame. Ideally the victim is coached beforehand and knows that giggles, grins and avoidance of eye contact are to be expected and why. Alternatively the facilitator asks one or two simple questions such as (to the victim): "what would need to happen for you to believe that x really is sorry?" or, with a victim bursting out: "She is laughing. She ain't sorry" addressing the wrongdoer with a "would you like to respond to that?"

Shame as an essential ingredient of restorative interventions is the basis of John Braithwaite's theory of Reintegrative Shaming.

Indigenous communities had to rely on their members to survive, they could not afford to send away members of the community that had done wrong (as you would a wrong doer from outside your community). Instead that person had to first admit and then repair the harm they had caused, followed by a full reintegration and readmission into the community.

Schools traditionally have been treating wrongdoers like outsiders that had to be sent away. However, like in these indigenous communities the wrongdoers are part of our own community and therefore need dealing with in a manner that is appropriate for "your own". Restorative Justice seeks to explore harm caused, explore the effects of that harm on others, and then to repair that harm in order for the offender to be reintegrated into their community.

An important tenet of the Real Justice Script is the exploration and admission of harm caused. Indeed, if a wrong doer does not admit to harm caused, restorative intervention will not take place. Admission of harm caused will, however, lead to a disruption of positive affect, hence Shame. This Shame is an essential aspect of the restorative process. Only by admitting wrongdoing can you start closing the disconnection caused by the original act of wrongdoing in the first place. Hence, Braithwaite's Reintegrative Shaming is not an act of humiliation, which by its very nature is punitive, but instead a temporary "exilement" of the offender in order for them to be allowed back into their community as whole.

This process is facilitated through the Real Justice script. The script consists of five key questions, asked of all parties:

- What happened?

By explaining what happened the wrongdoer "shames" himself. Significantly, no why questions are asked. The wrongdoer will explore their own actions. The victim gets the chance to explain what happened to them.

- What were you thinking?

This allows the wrongdoer to explain background and motivation of an offence. This allows the victim to explore their reactions within the Compass of Shame.

- What are you thinking now?

Here the wrongdoer can show they have reflected upon their act, and they have changed. The victim can formulate what has been on their mind, and what they need resolving.

- Who has been affected?

This is a crucial question since it explores the effect the harm has had on others. Often a wrongdoer does not even realize the consequences of their actions. This question builds empathy and it also allows for a deep recognition of the effects of one's' behaviours. The wrongdoer owns his/ her behaviour. The victim hears admission that harm has been caused to them. This very often is the first step of healing.

- What could you do to make it right?

This is where the offender is given the opportunity to repair the harm, make amends and become once again a fully integrated member of the group. The victim can play part in repairing the harm done to them by being involved in agreeing to fair and appropriate reparation.

The Real Justice Script does expect a wrongdoer to admit to harm caused, and to repair that harm. However, restorative reparation always is voluntary. No-one is ever forced into it against their will. You can only repair something that is broken, and to restore you need a will and a need that comes from within.

Fair process, a real Justice tenet, further ensures that no punitive or vindictive outcome is sought. The wrongdoer will be fully aware of the process, the solution is agreed upon by all parties, and victim, wrongdoer and their respective supporters can work together to come to a fair and appropriate agreement.

Thus, whilst Restorative Practice in both its sociological and anthropological origins recognises Shame as a basic ingredient, it also distinguishes between the shame a victim may feel and the shame necessary it is necessary for an offender to feel.

In schools, shame in its sociological understanding, accompanies every verbal reprimand, every detention, and every exclusion. Indeed, every re-admission meeting is based upon a concept of shaming, since the excluded student would be confronted with the behaviour that had caused their exclusion in the first place, and would subsequently be asked to adhere to behaviour rules set for them. A restorative meeting, too, would expect admission of harm, but it would allow the student to repair the harm they had caused by finding and suggesting their own fair and appropriate reparation – with a further crucial difference that the victim that had been affected by the harm caused would get a voice and be heard, thus healed, something we often neglect in school settings.

For the wrongdoer not having to admit to causing harm in order to avoid “shaming” him, re-victimises the victim; for a victim not hearing admission of the effects of harm caused and seeing an effort to repair that harm leads to disempowerment and re-victimisation.

For schools to use punitive rather than restorative Shame means that we alienate and exile our most troubled community members.

Let's not be afraid of Shame, but let's give our wrong doers a chance to repair the harm they have caused and become valued members of our school communities once again.

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